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ABSTRACT

During the summer following the program's first year of operations, the Macy Program teachers at Hillhouse High School (New Haven, Connecticut) began developing an after school advisory unit for the 1986-87 school year that was to include a component aimed at improving students' interpersonal skills. The Macy Program in general is a four-year academic program with special supportive services to prepare students for college and professional schools. The following aspects of the advisory program are discussed: (1) scheduling; (2) group composition; (3) preparation; (4) peer support; (5) evaluation; (6) goals and objectives; (7) proposed activities for intensive group sessions, including group formation, interpersonal communication, problem solving, and transitioning the group to a weekly schedule; (8) suggested activities for weekly group sessions, including role playing and group discussion; (9) evaluating the relationships component; and (10) additional resources for the relationships component. A suggested reading list is included. (BJV)

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James Hillhouse High School
New Haven, Connecticut

1986-87 School Year

Plan For Macy Program Advisory Unit Relationships Component

July 25, 1986

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Macy/Herzog Pre-Collegiate Enrichment Program

The Hillhouse Macy/Herzog Prep Program is a four year intensive academic program with special supportive services to prepare students for college and professional schools.

The program is designed to meet the needs of both well motivated and potentially motivated students. Eligibility is determined by standardized test scores, teacher grades, teacher recommendations and parental commitment to the program.

The program is funded by the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation and the Carl Herzog Foundation. These two foundations are dedicated to increasing the number of minority students academically prepared and able to pursue careers in the health professions.

The program goals are: 1.) to improve student cognitive functioning in the areas of reading, writing, problem solving, critical and analytical thinking and research skills; and 2.) to improve affect through supportive experiences that will increase students' self-confidence and allow them to have higher expectations of themselves.

Center for Research on Education, Culture and Ethnicity

CRECE is a departmental unit of Yale University's Institution for Social and Policy Studies that supports the study of issues related to minority education. From 1984 to 1986 CRECE also supported The Program of Resources for the Improvement of Minority Education.

PRIME was a research, development and technical assistance agency created by the City College of New York, Yale University, and the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation that sought to provide leadership and coordination to several public school programs funded by the Josiah Macy Foundation.

This paper reports on the plan for a component of the 1986-87 Macy program that was developed during the final weeks of a PRIME consultation. The consulting was done at Hillhouse High School in New Haven, Connecticut while the author was supported as a CRECE postdoctoral fellow during the 1985-86 academic year.

Overview Of The Relationships Component

During the summer following the program's first year of operation*, the Macy Program teachers at Hillhouse High School began developing an afterschool advisory unit for the 1986-87 school year that was to include a component aimed at improving students' interpersonal relationship skills.

Scheduling

This component of the advisory program was to start during the fourth week of school and run until the end of the school year. Initially, there would be a three week intensive, during which three meeting days a week would be devoted to laying the ground rules for effective group discussion and introducing the techniques to be used. After that the advisory groups were to meet at least one day a week for the rest of the school year.

Group Composition

It appeared that there would be about forty-five tenth grade students in the next year's program, and with six advisors this would mean six or seven students to a group. The fourteen or fifteen students who were also in the Independent Study and Seminar Program (ISSP), which was also scheduled to meet afterschool, would make up two of these groups and would meet on a more limited schedule that involved only six days of intensive group work. At the end of the intensive, a total group session would be arranged to provide an opportunity for exchange between the limited and full schedule students.

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*See: "Yearend Report On Macy Program Consultation" ED 282 480

Preparation

Eight hours of preliminary sessions were to be scheduled, so that the advisors would have an opportunity to prepare for the group facilitator role by: 1.) reviewing the plan for group development; 2.) trying out some of the proposed activities; 3.) discussing how to handle sensitive issues that were likely to arise; and 4.) developing strategies for mutual support of one another's efforts to function as effective group facilitators.

Peer Support

The advisors would also have the option of participating in an ongoing support session facilitated by one of the program's educational consultants. The advisors would therefore be asked to keep a brief log of issues discussed in the advisory group that could be used to provide a progress report in the weekly support sessions. They would also be encouraged to keep a journal that could be used to undate anyone else working with their students on a temporary basis or returning after an absence.

Evaluation

A self definition task completed by the students and a checklist of interpersonal behavior that would be completed by teachers and parents was to be used to evaluate the effectiveness of this component of the advisory unit. Since it was to deal with a highly personal realm of activity and would involve a type of learning that was unlikely to be time bounded, it was strongly recommended that students not be graded or given course credit for their participation.

Goals And Objectives Of The Relationships Component

Primary Goal

By the end of the school year the students who had participated in this part of the program were expected to have had an opportunity to develop and demonstrate greater skill in the area of interpersonal communication and in solving interpersonal problems with fellow students, with teachers and other school authorities, and with members of their families.

Subgoal A: The first step in this process would be to help students identify strengths and weaknesses in their own interpersonal communication style through the use of the following techniques:

a. active listening

b. awareness of communication style

c. awareness of blocks in communication

d. awareness of roles

e. role playing

f. giving feedback

Subgoal B: The second step in the process will be to help students learn to identify strengths and weaknesses in their problem solving styles using the following model:

a. defining the problem

b. considering alternative solutions

c. evaluating preferred solutions

d. adopting a suitable course of behavior

Proposed Activities For Intensive Group Sessions*

Group Formation

During the first two sessions, the ground rules for group participation are to be established and the schedule of meetings reviewed. A sequence of activities aimed at engendering trust within the group is also be conducted:

Introductions: After the advisor explains the ground rules of the group, you are asked to introduce yourself to someone else in the group, and that person is asked to introduce you to the group. [active listening]

Self presentation: You are asked to write something important about yourself on an index card. After the cards are collected, you are asked to do a card for each of the other members of the group on which you write something you have observed that you feel is important about that person. Once all the cards have been collected, they are read aloud one at a time, and the group tries to guess who it is that is referred to by each card. [communication styles]

Self disclosure: You are asked to draw a diagram of your family and to explain it to the group. You are then asked to draw a diagram of your close friends and to talk to the group about how that diagram compares with your family diagram. [awareness of roles]

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*All or part of this sequence may be used, depending on the group, and other activites can be substituted where appropriate. The student's perspective is adopted here in describing the activities in order to encourage a sense of how students are likely to respond to them.

Interpersonal Communication

The next three sessions are to be devoted to a series of activities exploring the different ways group members may choose to communicate:

Self awareness: You are asked to talk about the roles you play in your family and among friends. The emphasis is first on labeling the roles and then on deciding how appropriate they seem to be. [role playing]

Group awareness: You are asked to talk about the roles you have tended to play in the group so far and whether you gain anything by playing such roles. [role playing/awareness of roles]

Interpersonal awareness: You are asked to define yourself in terms of whether you have tended to be a talker or a nontalker so far in the group. Pairs are then formed with a talker and a nontalker. The talkers are asked to interview the nontalkers about why they don't express themselves more in the group and then to report back about what they learned. Next, the nontalkers are asked to interview the talkers about why they don't express themselves less in the group and then to report back about what they learned. [active listening/communication blocks]

Changing interpersonal behavior: The talkers and nontalkers are asked to exchange roles for at least fifteen minutes. Afterwards the group will discuss what that experience felt like. [awareness of roles/role playing]

Assessing interpersonal behavior: You are asked to tell each of your fellow group members something you appreciate about him or her and also

something you are not able to appreciate. As you give this feedback, you are encouraged to explore whatever it is that seems to get in the was of your appreciating certain aspects of the other person. As facilitator, the group advisor may decide to call attention to how often the same kinds of attitudes or behaviors are mentioned by various group members in describing certain individuals. [giving feedback/blocks in communication]

Problem Solving

The next three sessions are to be used for discussion of three fictional cases dealing with various types of interpersonal problems that high school students are typically required to solve in some way.

Problems with peers: Arnetta Gibbs has always gotten excellent grades, and, going into her senior year, it seems likely that she will graduate at the top of her class. She has been encouraged to apply to a number of highly ranked out-of-state colleges and is looking forward to going away to school next year. Recently, however, she began dating a classmate named Anthony Jackson. Arnetta has always been interested in Anthony, but now that he is actually asking her out, she finds herself questioning how serious she really wants to get with him.

They get along well most of the time, but it bothers her that whenever she talks about going away to school, Anthony becomes kind of quiet and moody. He doesn't seem to understand when she wants to spend time on her studies instead of talking to him on the phone, and he feels she should be able to go out with him more often than her parents will allow. The last time the

issue of her college plans came up was one night when they were coming back from the movies, and Anthony suggested that they park somewhere for a while. When Arnetta tried to explain how important it was that she not do anything to jeopardize her chances of going away to school next year, he abruptly announced that he would just take her home and then drove the rest of the way in total silence.

When they got to her house, he accused her of having mixed up values and said no man in his right mind would ever want a woman who thought personal success was more important than her relationship with the man she loved. Since that night, Arnetta has felt very confused about what she should do. She really does care about Anthony and likes having a boyfriend, but she knows how disappointed her family would be, if something happened to interfere with her college plans. Even if she is able to resist Anthony's demands for more intimate involvement and still continue to go out with him, she feels certain that it would be a problem, if she went off to college without him, but, so far, he hasn't even applied anywhere.

Some questions for discussion

1. What is the problem Arnetta needs to solve?
2. What alternative solutions can you see?
3. What solution would you choose in her position? Why?

4. How would you define the problem from Anthony's viewpoint?
5. What alternatives do you see for him?
6. What solution would you choose in his position? Why?

Problems with authority figures: Blake McIntyre did not do very well in most of his courses during his first two years in high school, but now that he is a junior, he has decided that he is going to work hard to bring up his grades. He feels confident that he can do it, but it worries him that his teachers may not recognize his efforts to improve. Blake's older brother, Benjamin experienced a similar turn around at about the same point in high school and is now a sophomore in college. Over the Summer Ben spent a lot of time with Blake talking about college and about what he would need to do to get in. He told Blake to start talking with his teachers more, so they could see that he was serious about wanting to bring up his grades. He also pointed out that Blake would eventually need to get good letters of recommendation from some of this teachers and that it would probably help if they had gotten to know him a little better by that time.

Blake agreed that it sounded like a good idea when Ben was talking to him about it, but in the Fall when he found himself barely passing his English course, he just couldn't imagine going in to talk with Bertha Powell, who taught the course. For one thing, he wouldn't know what to say, and if one of his friends saw him hanging around the building after school trying to get in good with somebody like her, they would never let him live it down. It was okay to go see the basketball coach about whether you were going to make the team, but nobody talked to teachers like Mrs. Powell. Blake wouldn't mind ending up at his brother's college and feels like he might even be able to get an athletic scholarship with better grades, but there's limits to what he'll do to get them.

Some questions for discussion

1. What is the problem Blake needs to solve?
2. What alternative solutions do you see?
3. What solution would you choose in his position? Why?

4. How would you define the problem from Ben's point of view?
5. What alternatives do you see for him?
6. What solution would you choose in his position? Why?

7. How would you define the problem from Bertha Powell's viewpoint?
8. What alternatives do you see for her?
9. What solution would you choose in her position? Why?

Problems with family members: Clarissa Simon would love to become a dancer, but her mother, Clara Simon insists that she will not be able to support herself by dancing. Clarissa's older brother, Carl went to college for two years and now has a job as a computer software salesman. Her sister, Constance had a baby while she was still in highschool and now works as a receptionist to support herself and her five year old son, Cedric. Cedric's father, Cecil Matthews is an unemployed brick layer and has not been able to contribute much to the little boy's support. It bothers Risa that her mother, who is a registered nurse, seems to work so hard at a job she doesn't enjoy. Most nights Clara Simon comes home tired and irritable, and, if she talks at all, it's to complain about how things are going at the hospital.

Risa also resents the fact that Carl makes so much money but spends most of it on himself. They often get into arguements about it, and she accuses him of being selfish and inconsiderate. He insists that image is important in his line of work and that dressing well and driving the right kind of car are crucial to his career advancement. He feels that it's enough that he hasn't gotten his own apartment, because he knows his mother is counting on what he contributes for rent to free up some of her money for Connie's family.

Seeing what happened to her sister helped to convince Risa that she should be in a college prep program, but, so far, her grades have reflected the fact that her heart isn't really in it. Now, at the beginning of her sophomore year, she is seriously questioning whether she should be aiming for college. It really seems like it would make more sense for her to just get a job as soon as possible, so that she could take some of the load off her mother. If she spends all those years going to college and medical school first, her nephew, Ced will be grown before Risa gets to the place where she'll have any kind of money to contribute. On the other hand, if she tries to become a dancer, she's afraid she may never get to that place.

Some questions for discussion

1. What is the problem Clarissa needs to solve?
2. What alternative solutions can you see?
3. What solution would you choose in her position? Why?
4. How would you define the problem from Connie's point of view?

5. What alternatives do you see for her?
6. What solution would you choose in her position? Why?

7. How would you define the problem from Carl's point of view?
8. What alternatives do you see for him?
9. What solution would you choose in his position? Why?

10. How would you define the problem from Mrs. Simon's viewpoint
11. What alternatives do you see for her?
12. What solution would you choose in her position? Why?

Transitioning The Group

The last two days of the intensive phase are to be devoted to finishing up any left over issues for discussion and preparing the advisory group for the transition to a weekly meeting schedule. A total group session is also to be scheduled at this point so that all the students in the program can meet together and share with one another something of what they've been doing in their various groups. While the advisors are expected to take primary responsibility for designing this session, their groups may want to contribute as well by indicating activities that they found particularly enjoyable or suggesting other activities that might be more appropriate for a larger group session. Some advisors may also wish to arrange individual contact time with group members who seem to have issues that would benefit from one-to-one attention before the end of the intensive phase.

Suggested Activities For Weekly Group Sessions

Role Playing

In order to help students improve their interpersonal skills, role playing is to be used throughout the year whenever blocks in communication are identified. This activity might involve working on problems that arise between group member and group member or between group members and other students outside the group. It may also involve members working on problems with teachers or other authority figures or with members of their families. The role play might involve a pair or a scenario group of three or more people. The advisor might or might not engage in some of the role playing, and it would even be possible to invite someone who was having difficulty with a member outside the group to come and role play the situation during one of the group sessions.

Group Discussion

In order to help students develop the ability to use problem solving skills in interpersonal situations, group discussion of personal issues is to be encouraged throughout the year. These discussions might be sparked by the comments of individual group members, or the advisor might feel that a given topic was appropriate to pursue at a particular point in time. Possible topics for discussion:

Emotional problems

- -long term sadness or depression
- -uncontrolled anger or violent behavior
- -unreasonable restlessness or impatience

School involvement

-lack of academic commitment

-lack of social involvement

-lack of service involvement

-difficulty relating to teachers

-difficulty realting to other school authorities

-open conflict with teachers

-open conflict with other school authorities

-outside commitments that compete with school involvement

Family relations

-need for emotional suppoport

-need for financial support

-problems of control or discipline

-conflict with family members

-loss of family members

Peer relationships

-feeling alone or isolated

-having difficulty making friends

-feeling misused or abused by friends

-feeling jealous or competitive with friends

-feeling pressure to use cigarettes, alcohol or other drugs

-feeling pressure to become sexually involved

-lack of support for academic achievement

Evaluating The Relationships Component

Self Description Task

Students might be asked to write a one page self description assessing their own interpersonal skills and defining areas of strength as well as areas of weakness. This might be done before the beginning of the intensive and again near the end of the school year to get some idea of how performance on this task has changed by that time.

Interpersonal Behaviors Checklist

A checklist that included items dealing with listening skills, communication styles and ability to solve social problems might be used to obtain individual assessments of the students from their advisors and from of their classroom teachers as well as from a parent or guardian. The checklist could be administered periodically throughout the school year or once near the end of the year. However, it would be highly inappropriate to consider giving grades or course credit for participation in this particular component of the advisory unit.

Additional Resources For The Relationships Component

Human Resources

In addition to the six advisors, there is expected to be one regular substitute and one or two consultants to help with advisor preparation provide ongoing support.

Suggested Reading

1. Kirschenbaun, Howard & Glaser, Barbara. Developing Support Groups: A Manual For Facilitators and Participants. San Diego, CA: University Associates, 1978.

2. London, Kathleen & Caparulo, Frank. Who Am I? Who Are You? Coping with Friends, Feelings and other Teenage Dilemmas. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1983.

3. Palomares, Uvaldo & Logan, Ben. A Curriculum on Conflict Management: Practical Method for Helping Children Explore Creative Alternatives for Dealing with Conflict. Spring Valley, CA: Palomares & Associates, 1975.

4. Simon, Sidney B. & Bellanca, James (eds). Degrading the Grading Myths: A Primer of Alternatives to Grades and Marks. Alexandria, VA: Association For Supervision & Curriculum Development, 1976.

5. Simon, Sidney B. et al. Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies For Teachers and Students. Spring Valley, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985.

6. Wells, Harold C. & Canfield, Jack. One Hundred Ways to Enhance Self Concept in the Classroom: A Handbook for Teachers and Parents. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1976.

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